December 13, 1987

Dear Culver & Bill,

It's been another tumultuous year for me, primarily due to health problems. After a progressive decline, I was finally diagnosed with AIDS on October 2nd. It was no surprise (more like a relief) for I've known for several years that something was brewing. It was like carrying a time bomb inside of me, knowing that some day it would go off. The only question was when?

About a week after the diagnosis, feeling distracted, confused, fatigued, and just wanting to quietly die and get it over with, I went to the March on Washington for Lesbian/Gay Rights. That was the best decision I ever made. What an experience! Six days of lobbying, protests, demonstrations, and celebration by 500,000 of my brothers and sisters. The numbers alone were overwhelming, but

the sense of solidarity, unity, and love was inspiring and electrifying.

The AIDS memorial quilt on the mall made a very powerful and touching statement — 2600 panels, each 3x6 feet, each made by family, friends, or lovers of the person commemorated, all linked together in a stunningly eloquent mosaic that covered a 2-city-block area. Many of my friends were represented there.

It was gut wrenching and yet therapeutic. It was our first public and massive display of grief and it was so needed. The crowd was somber and reverent. The only sounds that could be heard were the shuffling of feet along the canvass walkways and weeping as friends, and sometimes total strangers, hugged and comforted one another.

And as if our hearts could stand anymore we marched 250,000 strong down Constitution Avenue past the White House and on to the capitol. Five hundred thousand were on the mall when Jesse Jackson spoke. He

held hands, sang, cheered, and chanted – and I never felt so loved in my entire life. The people with AIDS (and there were hundreds of us) were provided with reserved seating, free food, blankets, and support people.

In all of that crowd there was not one reported act of violence or disturbance of the peace – not one arrest. What a day!

We saved our anger for the massive civil disobedience at the Supreme Court 2 days later. I am proud to have been among the 840 faggots and dykes who were arrested that day. The action was incredibly well planned and orchestrated, most of us having been in civil-disobedience training during the days and weeks before the March on Washington.

We stood nose-to-nose with helmeted, riot-gear equipped, batons-at-the-ready police officers. Arms linked we tossed thousands of paper pink

triangles into the air and sang, "We are a gentle angry people and we are singing, singing for our lives." As soon as the police would clear one wave of protestors off the forbidden steps another wave of us would take their place. Meanwhile another 3-to-4000 people stood across the street and chanted their support.

With rare exception the police were kind and gentle, even when dragging us off to the waiting paddy wagons. In many cases (especially the black officers) they expressed their support. In one incident, a protestor mounted the steps carrying a huge American flag whipping in the breeze. As he attempted to fold the flag a police officer stepped forward, grasped the loose end of the flag, and the two of them folded the flag together in the traditional triangular pattern to the wild cheers (and a few tears I might add) of the crowd.

In 5 hours of protest there was not one act of violence - a tribute to gay and lesbian folks as well as to the police. I was so proud of my people.

My affinity group (partly arrestees and partly support people) stuck together until we were all out of jail. Then we all went out to dinner - had a whole section of the restaurant to ourselves (and were treated like royalty by the restaurant staff when they learned that most of us had just gotten out of jail). We had a marvelous closing circle with each one having a chance to speak about their feelings for the group & the events of the day. What a day! What a day!

The reason for telling you all of this is that I want you to understand that I was transformed by the Washington experience. I went to Washington giving myself die messages and I returned to San Diego energized, inspired, and committed to living with AIDS.

I went to Washington confused and directionless. I came home with a new sense of purpose and knowing exactly what to do with the rest of my life. I rediscovered the joy of being gay.

Upon return to San Diego I came out of my AIDS closet, quit my job and went on disability. I could no longer justify using up every bit of energy each day just going to work. The extra rest and stress reduction has done wonders. I feel better, look better, have regained the 14 pounds that I had lost, and am more at peace with myself and the world than ever before.

I am still very anemic and am unable to take the stairs 2 at a time like I used to. But otherwise I do pretty much what I want. I am on AZT and tolerating it pretty well. Most importantly, I am blessed with a large and loving support group.

And, as if all that wasn't enough, in early november I descovered a tumor in my left testicle and had my second orchiectomy (the first one was in 1975). Again it was seminoma. But because of my previous experience I sought treatment much earlier. I am not a candidate for radiation therapy because I received maximum dosage in 1975. Further, in the presence of AIDS it would very detrimental.

I have decided against chemotherapy and my doctor is supportive of that decision. It probably isn't necessary anyhow as CAT scan of abdomen and pelves was negative, and blood tests for tumor markers have been negative. So we are assuming that I was cured by the surgeon. As a precaution, we'll do semi-annual CAT scans.

On December 7th, I founded the Lesbian/Gay Archives of San Diego - a pet project which I've had on the back burners for years. It's an enormous undertaking that will re-

quire some heavy-duty fund raising over the next few years. But I'm very excited about it.

I'm sorry to be sending lousy news at Christmas time, but I thought you'd want to know what is going on. And I hope you have gathered from this letter that my spirits are very high. I am grateful for each day of well-being and I don't spend a lot of time dwelling on what the future might bring. I think I have a healthy balance between realistic assessment of my health status and a sense of hope. I am more at peace than I've been for years.

I hope you are all well and happy and that your holidays are just what you want them to be.